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REPRESENTATIVE  
**RODNEY TOM**  
48TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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**2004 LEGISLATIVE  
SESSION PROGRESS  
REPORT TO THE  
COMMUNITY**

*Dear Friends and Neighbors*

*It was an action packed session this year, with the Legislature passing several important measures. This update highlights accomplishments in education, health care, the primary election and construction litigation.*

*Thanks for all your emails, letters, calls and visits. Your input helps me identify issues of importance to you. Please keep your communications coming. With those priorities in mind, I strive to work in cooperation with fellow lawmakers to put Washington back on track to economic prosperity, create excellence in education for all children and provide lasting solutions for our health care system focusing on prevention.*

*It's an honor to serve and represent you. I'm always interested in your thoughts, opinions and questions, and look forward to seeing many of you soon!*

*Sincerely,*

*Rodney Tom*

Rodney Tom



*Rep. Tom debating an issue  
on the House floor.*

■ **HOW TO REACH ME**

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## K-12 IMPROVEMENTS

I'm proud to have helped pass several new laws designed to strengthen our schools, provide all students with a world-class education and help them succeed and compete in a dynamic, high-tech global economy.

### *Retaking the WASL*

Students now have the opportunity to retake the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) up to four times. The new law will help 10<sup>th</sup> graders pass portions of the test they initially failed, making sure they have a solid foundation in the basics. Starting in 2008 students must pass the WASL in reading, writing and mathematics in order to graduate. Science will be added in 2010. The real strength of the WASL is in testing 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders. This helps identify students who are struggling, provides them the help they need and ensures they're ready and able to compete in a knowledge-based economy once they graduate.



### *School levy relief*

A new law gives local school districts the resources they need to educate all our children. Levy amounts are determined by a complicated formula that relies in part on a "best guess" of anticipated state funds. When districts don't receive as much as projected, they can't

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## REP. RODNEY TOM 48TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

collect all of their voter-approved levy dollars. Now, school districts like those in Bellevue and Lake Washington will be able to collect all of the money authorized under their voter-approved levies, even if it exceeds the state formula for local funding.

### *Opportunity schools*

The Legislature passed a charter schools measure. A limited and targeted program, 45 new schools will participate over the next six years. That's a small fraction of the over 2000 public schools in our state. The primary purpose is to assist educationally disadvantaged students in meeting the state's academic achievement standards.

### *Learning assistance*

The state now has a better way to fund the Learning Assistance Program. This money helps struggling students in poor areas. A new law ensures schools receive funding and keep it as long as the need is still there. In the past, schools were penalized for the very success we wanted them to achieve. Targeting children most at risk is a solid investment in our future.

## AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE

A new law will help children make healthier choices in school and learn the benefits of physical exercise early in life. I'm pleased it includes my legislation to create a policy for middle schools that encourages physical education, nutrition and wellness. It calls for children to get at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise each school day. Statistics show 14 percent of children are obese. The number of overweight youngsters has doubled in the last 20 years, and the Centers for Disease Control and U.S. Surgeon General have declared obesity an epidemic. Obesity is related to deadly illnesses



including diabetes, heart disease and cancer. It clearly makes more sense to help children establish healthy lifestyles today that promote good health and prevent costly treatment of illness and disease later.

Another important component of prevention is curbing smoking-related illness, which costs the U.S. more than \$140 billion a year. In tight budgetary times, the public can no longer subsidize this habit. Studies on the dangers of second-hand smoke are irrefutable. Good health and affordable health care begin with our own choices. I co-sponsored a bill again this year to outlaw smoking in public places. I'll continue to fight for legislation that addresses the huge and growing costs associated with obesity and smoking, to achieve a real and lasting solution that helps people get and keep affordable health care.

## COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

The Northwest Kidney Center is an important local resource for seniors, families and health care providers in our community. I'm pleased to report that this local project operating out of Bellevue will receive \$300,000 for a sorely needed renovation, thanks to new funding in the state's 2004 capital budget.

## HELP FOR SENIORS

Seniors who have Medicare Supplement insurance can once again save hundreds of dollars a year — some say as much as \$300 — off the cost of their premiums. This new law, in effect right now and in time for annual renewals, gives seniors back their discounts for various payment methods, including electronic fund transfers or annual installments, and for spouses.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In Eastside suburbs — from Issaquah to Kirkland — condos are crucial to meeting the housing demand and offering an affordable option. In the last five years condo construction is down 50 percent, despite a red hot real estate market. This construction standstill is a result of builders being unable to obtain liability insurance.

A new law creates a two-pronged approach to solving the problem. First, it changes the burden of proof on damages to a more meaningful standard. In the past,



several lawsuits were based on improper nail patterns and other immaterial factors, and these frivolous lawsuits forced many good builders out of business.

Secondly, based on legislation I proposed, the law creates a new insurance warranty program that has proved successful elsewhere. In the four years since Vancouver, B.C. adopted this approach, there hasn't been a single lawsuit regarding defective condominium construction.

New condos shouldn't leak, and reputable builders shouldn't face frivolous lawsuits. This legislation will bring insurers back to the market and protect consumers. It provides an incentive to build watertight condominiums so homeowners are protected and get the quality construction they deserve and expect.

***Rep. Tom explaining  
his legislation to  
fellow lawmakers  
during session.***



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## CREATING JOBS

We must continue efforts to grow the economy and make Washington more competitive for attracting and keeping family-wage jobs. We passed legislation to continue tax incentives for employers that create high-tech, high-wage jobs. Some 560 companies are benefiting from them already and others will likely follow. It's these employers that will drive our economy in the future and grow this vital sector. Unfortunately, other legislation to spur economic growth and create new jobs did not become law, including a bill that calls for the governor to approve state agency rules and another to improve the workers' compensation program.

## COMPROMISE BUDGET

We passed a state budget that doesn't raise taxes, doesn't cut core programs and keeps nearly \$300 million in reserves. The Legislature cautiously endorsed this supplemental spending bill recognizing we will likely face a \$1 billion budget shortfall in the next biennium. All existing state programs—and any growth in the number of Washingtonians served by those programs—have been planned for and will continue to be funded.



## AN ELECTION FOR THE PEOPLE

I voted to preserve your rights in the upcoming primary election. I support the Top 2 system because it maintains Washington voters' independent nature of voting for the individual instead of the party and it's very close to what we had with the blanket primary. With this option, voters may choose any candidate, no one has to declare party affiliation and your vote stays private.

The governor vetoed parts of the legislation, however, leaving a Montana-style primary. With this option, voters are forced to choose only one party's ballot and can't vote for a candidate affiliated with another party. A citizen's initiative has already been launched to challenge this party-based system.

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